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ABSTRACT

To examine the textual features that distinguish descriptions and fictional narratives in the products of eight- and nine-year old writers, a study analyzed 14 compositions (seven descriptions and seven fictional narratives) written by 14 third grade students. The samples were rated by two qualified professionals working in writing research, assessment, and instructional materials development, using holistic methods and a four-point scale. After the compositions had been evaluated, they were typed and analyzed for features per T-unit. Preliminary analyses revealed that descriptions were distinguished from fictional narratives by more adjectives, greater lexical collocation, a greater variety of sentence roles, and by adverbial clauses of circumstances. Fictional narratives were distinguished from descriptions by more adverbs, more cohesive ties of conjunction, compound subjects and predicates, and greater movement along levels of abstraction. They also differed in some of the types of adverbial clauses found in text. These results suggest that the genres may be similar in textual features pertaining to numbers of verbs, nouns, and pronouns. They may also be alike in amount of lexical reference and repetition and in ratio of subordinate clauses to numbers of words and to T-units. (Materials used in the study are appended.) (HOD)

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TEXTUAL FEATURES IN THE DESCRIPTIONS AND FICTIONAL NARRATIVES OF YOUNG WRITERS

Ann Humes

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INTRODUCTION

Currently accepted definitions of discourse types have typically been developed by theoreticians on the basis of audience and function or purpose. These theories are intended to apply globally to written products, but the specific textual features of genres subsumed under these defined types cannot be inferred from such a "top-down" analysis. Furthermore, the specific textual features that characterize two different products (e.g., fictional stories and personal letters) classified as the same type of discourse (e.g., expressive) may be quite different. Products may also differ with the developmental stage of the writers.

To use a discourse-classification system in working with young writers, researchers and instructional-materials developers need to know the subset of features that characterize a product type within a classification when that text is produced by writers at different developmental levels. Sufficient information on the nature of such subsets is not available. A way to develop this taxonomy would be for researchers to employ an inductive approach in some of their discourse studies to discover the textual features (e.g., sensory terms and spatial ordering) that cluster together in different written products (e.g., a description). Features that cluster in the products of young writers should continue to co-occur (but perhaps with different frequencies) with other increasingly complex features in products of writers as they mature.

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TEXTUAL FEATURES IN THE DESCRIPTIONS AND FICTIONAL NARRATIVES OF YOUNG WRITERS

Ann Humes

ABSTRACT

This study examines the textual features that distinguish descriptions and fictional narratives in the products of eight- and nine-year-old writers. Results of the discourse analysis procedures are presented in terms of the differences between the two genres for specific textual features and correlations of holistic scores and these specific features.

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An exploratory study analyzing young writers' discourse products could establish the feasibility for a series of developmental studies that would take this "bottom-up" approach. Such a series of studies may identify the textual features of a genre. It may also determine when these features appear developmentally in writers' products. Furthermore, these discourse-analysis studies could eventually help refine the corresponding classification systems under which these genres are subsumed.

A study consistent with this logic was designed to investigate the textual features that co-occur to distinguish and/or define discourse types in the products of young writers, eight- and nine-year-old children, when they develop specific written genres. A more general purpose of the study was to explore the procedures that will yield a general method for such studies.

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Little research has been undertaken to determine the textual features that characterize different types of written products composed by young children. The structure of their descriptive discourse was examined for developmental and ethnic differences by Stahl (1977). Stahl analyzed the relation of descriptive features and quality ratings. Writers in grades two, five, and eight wrote descriptions of their homes, and Stahl examined the description for specific features: order, content, syntax, balance, connections, and "openings" and conclusions.

The few other available studies on this topic in elementary-school writing have investigated only syntactic features. If the studies by Jensen (1973) and Pope (1974) are excluded because they investigated only

oral discourse, the studies that can be cited are limited to those performed by San Jose (1972), Perron (1976, 1977), Crowhurst and Piche (1979), Crowhurst (1980), and most recently by Cooper and Watson (1981).

In 1972, San Jose, as described in Perron (1976), analyzed the T-Units* across modes of discourse, as promulgated by Bain (1890), in the writing of fourth grade students. Classroom teachers administered the samples in 20-minute time periods. San Jose's analyses revealed that the syntax in argumentation was the most complex, followed by exposition, narration, and description.

Perron (1976, 1977) studied syntactic complexity in the discourse of 153 children at three ability levels within grades three, four, and five. Students wrote twice a week for two weeks, each time composing in a different discourse mode--description, narration, exposition, and argumentation. In each of the three grade levels, syntactic complexity varied significantly across the modes, with argumentation producing the most complex syntax, and narrative, the least.

In another study employing the Bain (1890) system, Crowhurst and Piche (1979) examined the syntactic complexity of compositions written by sixth and tenth grade students, 60 boys and 60 girls. Crowhurst and Piche controlled for topic by using three pictures, and by prompting description, narration, and argumentation with each picture. At grade ten, the modes contrasted significantly for words per T-Unit, with argument having the most, followed by description and narration; for words

*A T-Unit is an independent clause and its modifiers.

per clause, with description and argumentation equal and with both modes greater than narration; and for clauses per T-Unit, with argument greater than narration and description. At grade six, the modes contrasted significantly on words per T-Unit and clauses per T-Unit. In all instances, argumentation was more complex than narration and description.

Crowhurst (1980) examined the relationship between syntactic complexity and quality ratings of the narrative and argumentative writing of students in grades six, ten, and twelve. Crowhurst found that arguments with high syntactic complexity were rated as significantly better than arguments with low syntactic complexity at both grades ten and twelve, but the difference was not significant at grade six. One interesting result at grade ten was that narrations with low syntactic complexity received significantly superior ratings over narrations with high syntactic complexity, suggesting that relatively simple syntax may be an attribute of narrative writing.

Cooper and Watson (1981) studied relationships between syntactic structures and discourse types in the writing of nine-year-old children. Students wrote and revised six essays in each of three types of discourse: expression, persuasion, and explanation (for a discussion of these types, see Lloyd-Jones, 1977). Cooper and Watson made 51 comparisons of syntactic features among the three discourse types and found significant differences across types for 30 of them.

The above research, though valuable, frustrates comparisons across studies because results are usually reported according to a specific discourse-classification system. One of six different systems is usually

employed by researchers engaged in studying composition. The six systems are those promulgated by Bain (1890), Britton (1975), Emig (1971), Kinneavy (1971), Lloyd-Jones (1977), and Moffett (1968). The study described below does not employ one of these systems at the expense of the other five. Rather, the prompts are described, and data are grouped and reported on in terms of genres. This design feature allows researchers using various classification systems to determine how these results fit into the systems they employ. For example, researchers employing the system used by Kinneavy would classify the fictional narratives as literary discourse; researchers using the system described by Lloyd-Jones would classify them as expressive discourse.

DESIGN

Fourteen compositions written by fourteen third-grade students were selected at random, seven descriptions and seven fictional narratives. The compositions were written within their regular classrooms by students in a large metropolitan school district.

The descriptions were written as part of a study of a set of writing prompts to be included in a written-language proficiency survey. The prompt for the descriptions consisted of a picture of an orange; students were instructed to describe the orange in terms of the senses--how it looks, tastes, smells, and feels when touched. (See the Appendix for the actual prompt.) The following is an example of the descriptions, complete with the errors produced by the third-grade writer.

An Orange

An orange is the color orange. When I pick up an orange My hands get sticky. An orange taste good and when I bite the orange the juice comes out. Sometimes when I open the orange My hands alredy get sticky.

When I open the orange it smells good. And the orange tasts good. The orange sometimes tasts nasty. But most of the time the orange tasts good. Sometimes I eat orange for snack. My mother likes oranges.

The fictional narratives were written during the actual proficiency survey. The prompt for the fictional narratives included a picture of two animals, an elephant and a monkey, each wearing a shirt with its name--Flash and Bounce. The animals in the picture are posed at the starting point of a race. Students were asked to describe the characters and write a story about the picture. (See the Appendix for the actual prompt.) The following is one of the fictional narratives:

The Race With Skates

One day there was a race. And two people where going to race. one was an eleghant and a monkey. The eleghants name was Flash and the monkey's name was Bounce. Well the race was about to bigin. They got ready and someone siad go and they went as fast as the wind did. And when the when bounce got to the finesh guess who was there. It was Flash. Then Bounce siad to his self know wonder they named him Flash he is as fast as a bulit could go shooting. And Flash got the prize. And everebody was cheering for Flash exept Bounce and he went home as slow as a snial. But somebody called out wait. And Flash went running and why dont we share and Bounce siad really can we live together and

> Flash siad yes. The monkey said all right you dont mind that I'm harry then Flash siad no if you dont mind that im big well I don't care. Then both shared there houses and they lived happly ever after.

The samples were rated by two qualified professionals working in writing research, assessment, and instructional-materials development, using holistic methods and a four-point scale. This rating was undertaken so that compositions could be read for preliminary identification of features by order of rating from highest to lowest, across the two discourse types (i.e., first the highest rated description and then the highest fictional narrative). It was assumed that compositions having more critical features of a genre would receive higher ratings and thus suggest important characteristics of the corresponding discourse. The procedure also allowed correlations between ratings and textual features.

The order of compositions for rating was counter-balanced within and between sets. Because some compositions did not receive the same ratings from both evaluators, they were submitted to a third, similarly qualified person for another rating. Ratings across all three evaluators were then totaled for ordering the compositions within each set. Results of the holistic evaluation are displayed in Table 1.

After the compositions had been evaluated, they were typed exactly as written by the students. The T-Units were then marked off in the typed texts, and the compositions were reformatted for reading, with each T-Unit listed separately and sequentially down the typed page. This format made the essays easier both to read and to analyze for features per T-Unit.

TABLE 1: HOLISTIC RATINGS FOR WRITING SAMPLES

Descriptions

Sample	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Scorer 1	3	4	2	1	4	2	2
Scorer 2	2	4	3	1	3	1	1
Scorer 3	3	4	3	1	4	2	2
Total	8	12	8	3	11	5	5

Fictional Narratives

Sample	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Scorer 1	3	3	2	4	2	1	2
Scorer 2	3	3	2	4	1	2	2
Scorer 3	3	3	2	4	1	2	2
Total	9	9	6	12	4	5	6

An inductive approach was employed to develop preliminary hypotheses about textual features in the compositions, such as the occurrence of some form-class words, syntactic features, and cohesive ties. Compositions were read and reread closely, alternating from the highest rated description to the highest rated fictional narrative. Then the next ordered description/fictional-narrative pair was read, until all compositions had been repeatedly read to bring contrasting and comparable features into focus as patterns.

These preliminary analyses suggested that microstructure and macrostructure differences and similarities characterized the two genres and that a number of formal analyses should be undertaken. These

included discourse analysis and statistical description (means, frequency-distribution histograms, etc.) of composition length in terms of words, T-Units, and words per T-Unit; of subordinate clauses; of form class of content, but not function, words; of cohesive ties; of sentence patterns; of sentence roles; of abstraction levels; and of information focus. These analyses included the computation of Pearson product-moment correlations to identify features that correlated with holistic scores within a set of compositions. Statistical tests (i.e., two-tailed t-tests for independent data) were applied to the results of selected analyses to determine differences between the two genres. Where appropriate, data were normalized to adjust for differences in the length between the descriptions and the fictional narratives before t-tests were performed. The mathematical procedure used to normalize the data is one commonly employed to transform data obtained from groups of unequal N to a standard scale: each writer's score on a variable (e.g., total adverbs) was divided by the writer's base variable score (e.g., total words) and multiplied by 100.

RESULTS: PRELIMINARY READINGS

As indicated above, the preliminary close readings suggested textual characteristics that should be examined by applying formal discourse-analysis procedures and submitting the results to statistical tests. Initial impressions during preliminary readings are discussed below by genre types.

Descriptions

Each description was comprised of a set of topic-oriented sensory statements that appeared first, generally followed by one or more statements that were preference or writer oriented. The typical paper presented a series of sentences that responded to the requests in the prompt for sensory description; it then shifted into a less formal style, with sentences relating non-descriptive, often personal information (e.g., "I eat oranges for snack"). Generally these latter statements seemed to be attempts to provide a conclusion for the discourse when the writer was unsure of how to end a description in isolation--writers are more accustomed to writing descriptions within the context of other genres, such as fictional narratives.

Most T-Units were assertions about the apparently fixed characteristics of the object. Variable characteristics were described with "sometimes" statements (e.g., "An orange is sweet, but sometimes it tastes nasty"). The combination of the description, contrast, and conclusion statements suggested that students cast their sentences in a variety of roles.

T-Units invariably contained present-tense verbs that contributed to the dominant tone of "scientific discourse." Two other features helped effectuate this tone: the indefinite article and the "generic" pronoun "you." The indefinite article "an" appeared in most of the statements positing the sensory qualities of the object students were describing. The "you" in these samples was the form defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976) as denoting "any human individual" (p. 53). Using this

generalized "you," which is technically exophoric, allows students to develop a tone of scientific objectivity without employing more difficult passive constructions (e.g., "When you pick up an orange, it feels cold" vs. "When an orange is picked up, it . . .").

A number of T-Units contained a subordinate clause in which the orange as patient was acted upon by the writer or the generic "you." This subordinate clause usually preceded a main clause naming a fixed attribute of the orange. Placing the action in the subordinate clause helped maintain the sense of objective, scientific description in the main clause. The following sentence exemplifies the typical action-statement construction:

> When you pick up an orange and open it,
> it smells good.

The tone of objectivity and distance contrasted with the tone of the personal statements injected in the latter part of the discourse. For example, a number of T-Units containing the indefinite article "an" and the "generic" pronoun "you" would be followed by a personal statement such as "I don't like to peel an orange, but I like to eat it."

The manner in which students described the various sensory experiences of an orange differed. For the sense of touch, students tended to make up adjectives (e.g., "gacky," "shubby"). Furthermore, nearly every writer used a different descriptor for this sense. In describing visual impressions, students focused on shape and color, with every student mentioning color, which is apparently the most salient critical attribute of the orange, probably because name and color are "homonymous." Descriptors for taste were limited in number and variety.

Fictional Narratives

Each story had a beginning section that set the scene: it described the characters and perhaps gave a time orientation (e.g., "Once there were . . ."); six of the fictional narratives ended with what could be classified as a concluding time orientation or reference (e.g., "They lived happily ever after"). The discourse in the descriptive sections was similar to the discourse in the descriptions of an orange; descriptive adjectives and present-tense verbs were employed as well as the indefinite articles "a" and "an." However, when the actual narrative began, cohesive references appeared, and sentences were cast in past tense with two exceptions: a few sentences referred to future events and, of course, required a change of aspect in the verb (e.g., "They will get out of the hospital in about 50 or 60 years"); sentences that contained dialogue had quoted elements cast in the present tense.

Five of the stories brought in a third character not shown in the prompt. These characters were important to the particular plot line developed by the students. These plot lines showed a common pattern of action followed by effect or result, which was followed by another action-effect sequence. Plots attempted to be humorous, frightening (i.e., through the addition of fantasy creatures such as a giant), or to teach a moral (i.e., be a good sport, or don't show off). Five of the seven narratives phased into dialogue at or after the halfway point in the composition, although none contained quotation marks to identify the beginning and end of the dialogue. Dialogue appeared to influence sentence patterns and T-Unit length.

The fictional narratives contained a variety of lexical verbs and clause types not evidenced in the descriptions. The texts were longer than the texts of the descriptions, and the quality of the writing seemed to be enhanced by students' voice and imagination.

RESULTS: FORMAL ANALYSES

Formal analyses of the results were undertaken after the initial reading of the compositions suggested characteristics to be examined. The procedures and results are described below by type of analysis.

Length and Syntactic Structure

The descriptions and the fictional narratives were analyzed for length and syntactic structure in terms of number of words and T-Units, words per T-Unit, and number and types of subordinate clauses.

Students wrote longer fictional narratives than they did descriptions. The total number of words in the descriptions varied from 32 to 75, with a mean of 47.28. Fictional narratives ranged from 66 to 209, with a mean of 119.71. Correspondingly, students wrote fewer T-Units in the descriptions. Numbers ranged from 5 to 11, with a mean of 7.29. T-Unit totals in the fictional narratives ranged from 8 to 26, with a mean of 14.85.

The average number of words per T-Unit ranged from 4.57 to 7.37 in the descriptions, with a mean of 6.49. The average number of words per T-Unit in the fictional narratives ranged from 6.00 to 15.87, with a mean of 8.06. The overall frequency of occurrence of the different T-Unit lengths is displayed in Figure 1. That figure reveals that the most

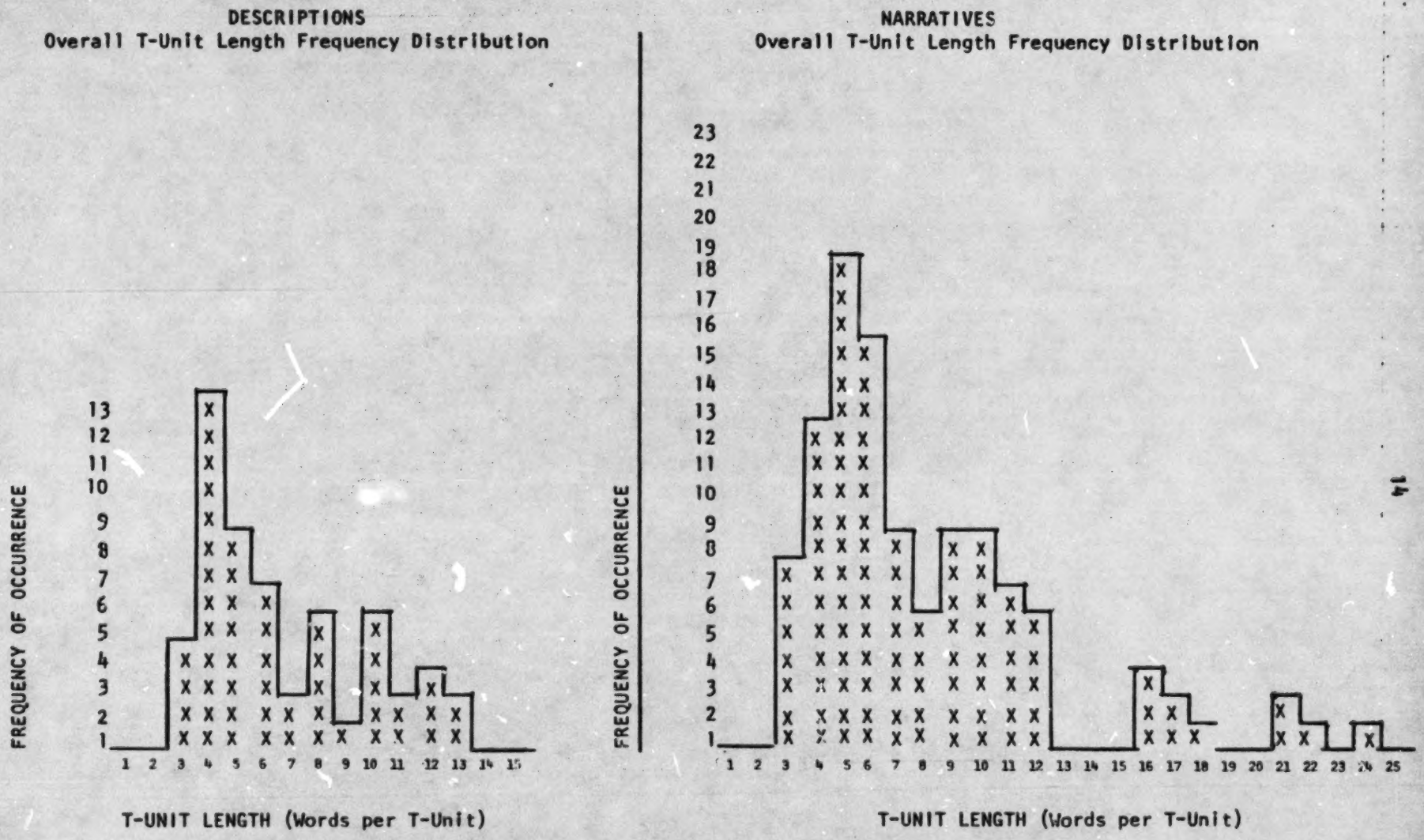


Figure 1. OVERALL FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE BY T-UNIT LENGTH (Words per T-Unit)

frequent length (i.e., the mode) for T-Units in the descriptions was four words, while the most frequent length for T-Units in the fictional narratives was five words. Actual length of students' T-Units is displayed in Figure 2; the graphs are ordered by the holistic ratings of the papers.

Figure 3 displays the mean length of T-Units by the order of the T-Units in the compositions. This figure reveals that, on the average, the second and third T-Units were the longest in the descriptions. The 24th T-Unit was the longest on the average in the fictional narratives; however, this result is derived from only two T-Units that were atypically long. The end T-Units in these graphs do not reflect performances of all students because some wrote shorter compositions. Consequently, the graphs in Figure 3 are supplemented with a display of the analysis of the last three T-Units across all students.

The frequency and types of subordinate clauses were analyzed for both the descriptions and the fictional narratives. Nominal clauses in the texts functioned as direct objects, complements, or object of prepositions. Adverbial clauses identified in the compositions were categorized in accordance with definitions in Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1972). The clauses included adverbials of reason, time, condition, cause, result, and circumstance. Adverbial clauses of circumstances were frequent in the descriptions, but did not appear in the narratives. Quirk et al. describe this type of clause as being "half-way between conditional clauses and clauses of reason" (p. 752). The only other adverbial clauses in the descriptions were coded as clauses of time and reason.

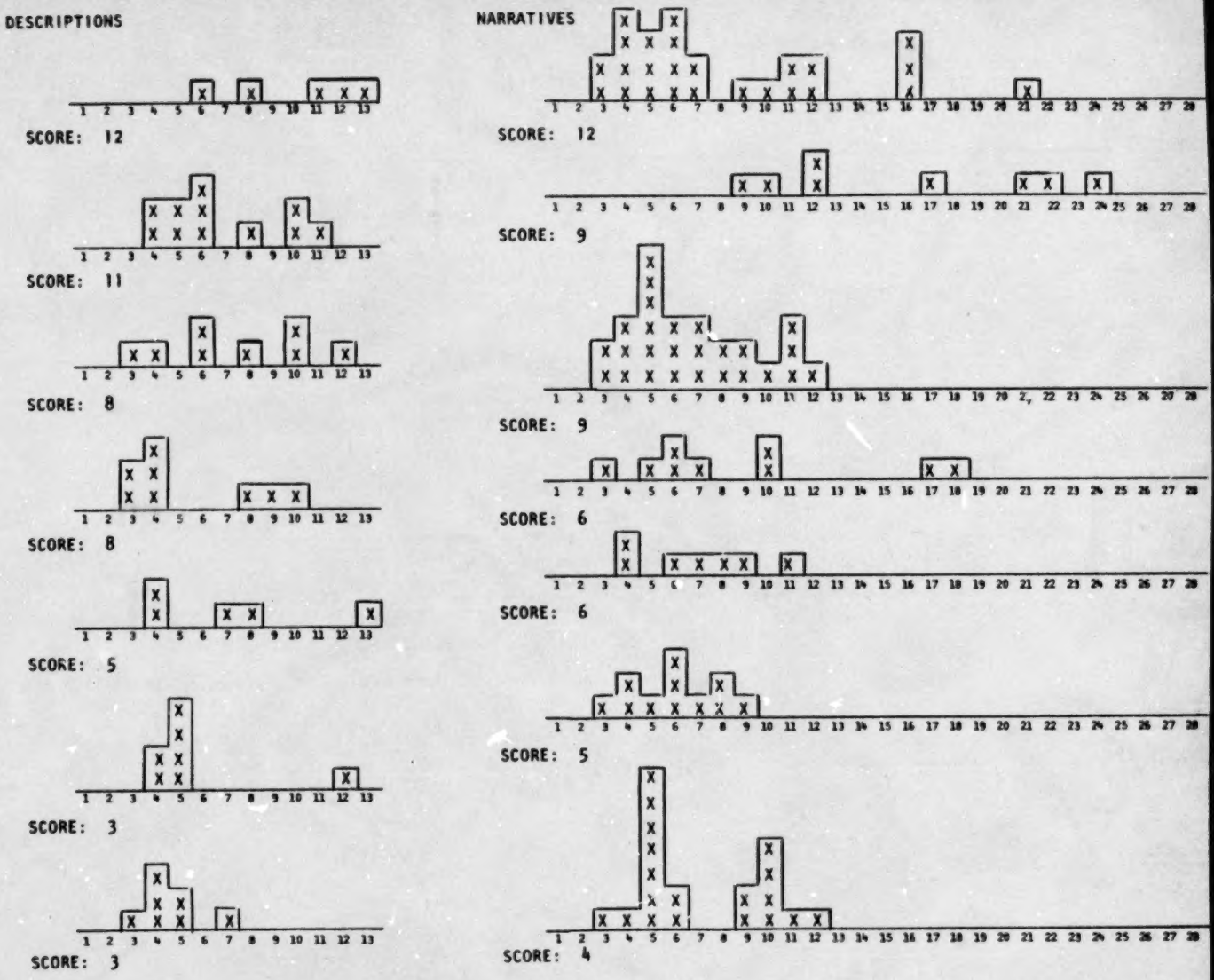


Figure 2. FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF T-UNIT LENGTH

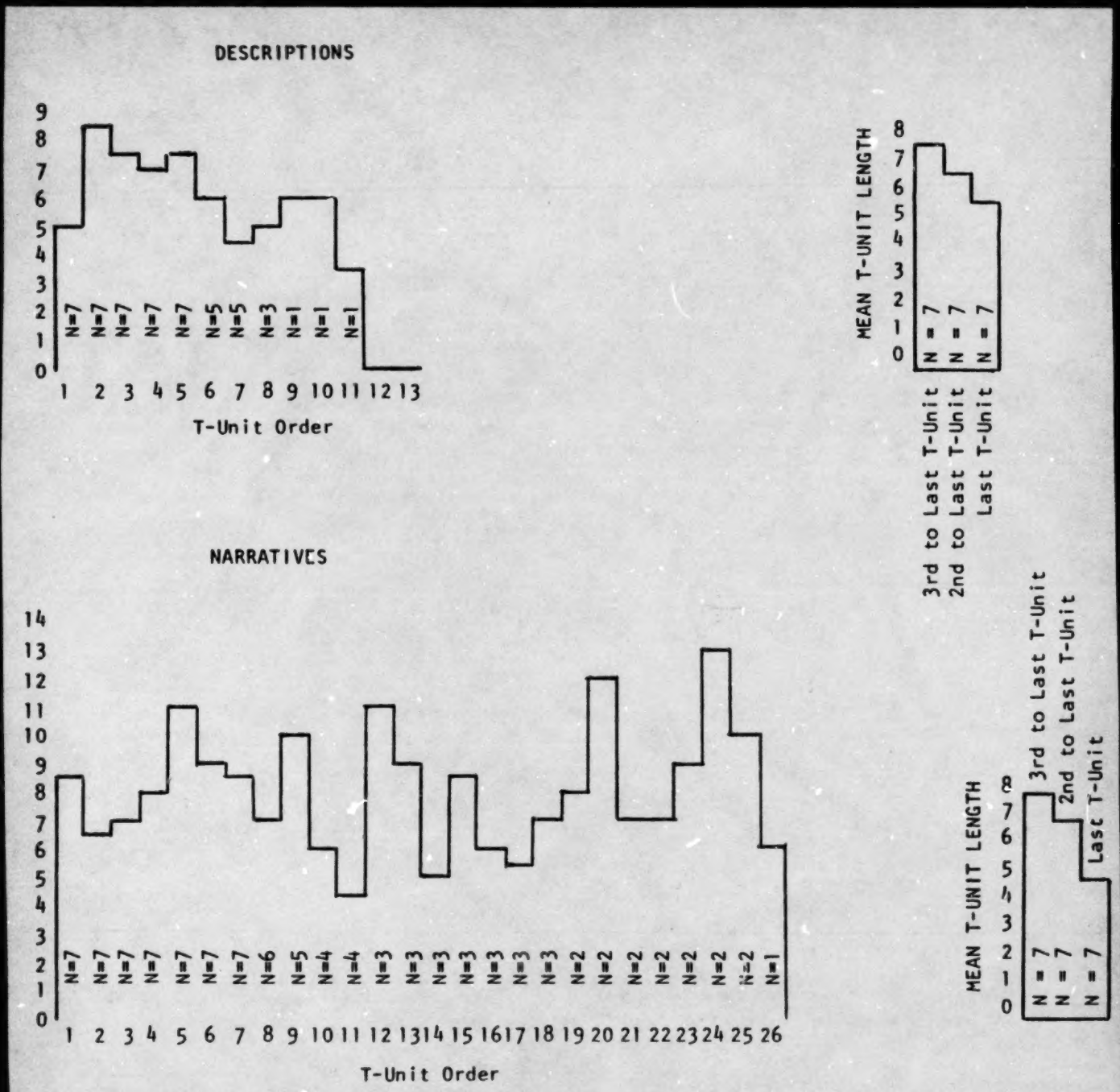


Figure 3. MEAN T-UNIT LENGTH BY T-UNIT ORDER

A greater variety of adverbial clauses appeared in the fictional narratives: reason, time, condition, cause, and result. Additionally, nominal clauses as direct objects appeared in T-Units of dialogue, with the dialogue serving as the direct object of the speaker tag.

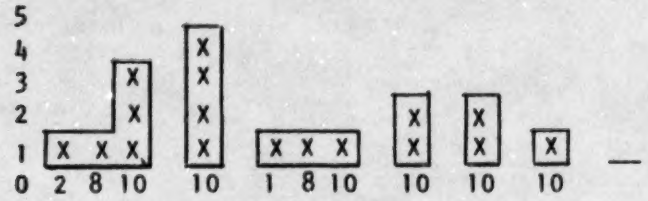
The frequency and types of subordinate clauses in the descriptions and the fictional narratives are displayed in Figure 4. They are presented, as other data are in subsequent analyses, in the order of their holistic rating, from the highest to the lowest.

Two-tailed t-tests were applied to the results of the analyses of the various features of composition structure to determine significant differences between descriptions and fictional narratives. The narratives had significantly more words than the descriptions (at the .01 level) and significantly more T-Units (at the .05 level). Results were not significant for average number of words per T-Unit or for number of subordinate clauses. Data were normalized for subordinate clauses before the t-test was applied. Results of the statistical analysis of composition structure are displayed in Table 2.

Form Classes

Because the preliminary readings suggested that adjectives and adverbs were important features of compositions with high holistic ratings, the content words in the descriptions and the fictional narratives were formally analyzed. Compositions were coded for the following categories: descriptive adjectives, adverbs, verbs, nouns, and pronouns; limiting adjectives were not included in the analysis because their effect in the text corresponds more to that of function words than

Rating	12	11	8	8	5	3	3
Composition	B	E	A	C	F	D	G



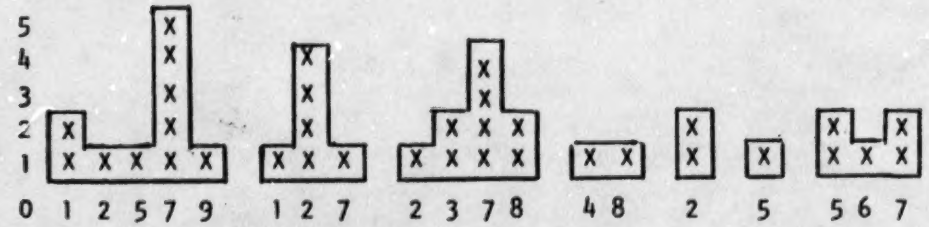
Type of Subordinate Clauses

DESCRIPTIONS

Key

1. Adv. Reason
2. Adv. Time
3. Adv. Condition
4. Adv. Cause
5. Adv. Result
6. Adjective
7. Nom. D.O.
8. Nom. O.P.
9. Nom. Complement
10. Adv. Circumstance

Rating	12	9	9	6	6	5	4
Composition	B	A	B	C	G	F	E



Type of Subordinate Clauses

Figure 4. FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

TABLE 2: ANALYSIS FOR COMPOSITION STRUCTURE

Feature	Means for Descriptions	Means for Narratives	t	Signif*
Total Words	47.28	119.71	3.170	.01
No. T-Units	7.29	14.85	2.393	.05
Words per T-Unit	6.49	8.06	1.473	NS
Subord. Clauses per 100 Words	4.16	3.79	0.779	NS
per T-Unit	0.36	0.34	0.140	NS

*df = 12

content words. Contractions were counted as separate words because they are composed of two different form classes. For example, "don't" was coded as two words, "do" and "not." All elements of verbs were counted--both auxiliary and lexical forms.

Two-tailed t-tests were applied after the data were normalized to adjust for the differences in length between the two genres and among the samples within a genre. The narratives had significantly more adverbs than the descriptions; the two genres were different at the .02 level per 100 words and at the .01 level per T-Unit. The descriptions had significantly more adjectives per 100 words (at the .01 level), but not per T-Unit, although the mean was somewhat higher. No significant differences between the two genres were found for verbs, nouns, and pronouns, but

again the mean for each was higher in the descriptions. The results of the statistical analysis are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3: ANALYSIS FOR FORM CLASSES

Feature	Means for Descriptions	Means for Narratives	t	Signif*
Adverbs				
per 100 words	6.37	11.79	2.903	.02
per T-Unit	0.43	0.94	4.130	.01
Adjectives				
per 100 words	11.39	5.96	3.249	.01
per T-Unit	0.72	0.52	1.298	NS
Verbs				
per 100 words	22.34	20.20	1.209	NS
per T-Unit	1.43	1.69	1.175	NS
Nouns				
per 100 words	18.83	16.94	0.714	NS
per T-Unit	1.22	1.46	0.869	NS
Pronouns				
per 100 words	13.59	11.56	0.741	NS
per T-Unit	0.92	0.94	0.102	NS

*df = 12

Cohesion

Four kinds of cohesive ties were coded and tabulated because they were frequent in the compositions: reference, lexical collocation, lexical repetition, and conjunction. Conjunction was further divided for

the analysis into the subcategories of adversative, additive, temporal, and cause-effect; however, instances of these subcategories were not frequent enough on an individual basis to apply statistical tests for each one, so they were collapsed into the superordinate category of conjunction.

After data were normalized, a two-tailed t-test was applied. Frequency of occurrence of lexical collocation was significantly higher in the descriptions than in the narratives (beyond the .001 level). The more frequent occurrence of conjunctions in the narratives approached significance, being between the .10 and .05 levels. An apparently anomalous high score comprised of additives in the descriptions influenced the results. Consequently, this score and the highest score for the fictional narratives were eliminated from a subsequent t-test; this second test revealed that the fictional narratives had significantly more instances of conjunction, beyond the .001 level. Results of the t-test for cohesion, before the adjustment for conjunction, are displayed in Table 4.

TABLE 4: ANALYSIS FOR COHESION

Cohesive Tie	Means for Descriptions	Means for Narratives	t	Signif.*
Reference	10.21	14.21	1.977	NS
Lex. Collocation	12.37	3.31	6.529	.001
Lex. Repetition	16.13	11.73	1.214	NS
Conjunction	3.59	7.71	1.882	NS
TOTAL	42.33	36.99	2.088	NS

*df = 12

Sentence Patterns

The initial readings suggested that the fictional narratives had a greater variety of sentence patterns than did the descriptions. Consequently, sentence patterns in both genres were formally analyzed. Patterns were coded in accordance with the patterns delineated in Quirk et al. (1972).

Several sentence-pattern features proved interesting in the analysis. Existential "there" sentences appeared only in the fictional narratives. Compound subjects and compound predicates were also found only in the narratives. Intensive verbs, which are equivalent to "linking verbs" in traditional grammar, appeared more frequently in the patterns of the descriptions, while extensive verbs were higher in the patterns of the narratives.

The descriptions evidenced 16 different sentence patterns; the fictional narratives, 37. However, for both genres two patterns were more frequent than any other. These patterns were Subject-Intensive Verb-Complement and Subject-Verb-Object. After data were normalized for differences in numbers of T-Units, a two-tailed t-test was applied. No significant differences were found between the two genres. The results are displayed in Table 5.

TABLE 5: ANALYSIS FOR NUMBER OF SENTENCE PATTERNS

Feature	Means for Descriptions	Means for Narratives	t	Signif.*
No. Sentence Patterns	61.47	68.07	0.949	NS

*df = 12

Sentence Roles

The role filled by each T-Unit was coded in accordance with guidelines provided by Cooper and Matsuhashi (in press). Cooper and Matsuhashi describe the following categories of roles and the specific types within those categories:

Generalizing Roles: state, restate

Rhetorical Roles: summarize, conclude

Sequencing Roles: add, replace, narrate

Relationship Roles: contrast/compare, infer, evaluate, cause/effect, qualify

Development Roles: exemplify, define, describe

Difficulties were encountered in applying these sentence roles to the T-Units in the compositions of third-grade students. Decisions sometimes seemed somewhat arbitrary because young students' compositions do not fit readily into the schema. In the descriptions, students were attempting to conclude their compositions, but the closest category was "exemplify" or "define," unless "conclude" itself was arbitrarily assigned on the assumption that this was the student's purpose. For these exemplify or define categories, a classify role would be appropriate (e.g., "It is a fruit").

For narratives, the state role was used for story-opening sentences that were not really serving narrate or describe roles (e.g., "Once upon a time there was a big race"). Additionally, sentences with dialogue quotations were difficult to classify because they often do not narrate events, yet they cannot legitimately be coded for any other role. For

this pilot study, these T-Units were coded as "Narrate-D" (i.e., narrate-dialogue) to distinguish them from sentences with straightforward narrative functions. Cooper and Matsuhashi assert that only an evaluate sentence can interrupt a narrative. Consequently, three sentences are classified as "Describe (Evaluate)" because these interruptives describe people or things in the setting (e.g., "He is as fast as a bullet could go shooting").

The description with the lowest score in its set was the only paper comprised solely of describe sentences; one paper with a score of 11 out of a possible 12 was comprised of fewer describe roles than total other roles.

In the narratives, all but the lowest scoring paper included some kind of state sentence within the "introductory" portion of the narrative; the introductory segment provided an orientation to the setting and the characters. The papers with relatively high total scores also closed with a sentence that serves a "conclude" role. Table 6 displays the sentence roles by order of occurrence in each of the descriptions. Table 7 displays the same information for the fictional narratives.

As is evident from Tables 6 and 7, the descriptions, considering their shorter lengths, contained a greater variety of sentence roles than did the narratives. However, no significant difference between the two genres was found when a t-test was applied.

TABLE 6: SENTENCE ROLES IN DESCRIPTIONS

Score: 12	Score: 11	Score: 8	Score: 8
Describe	Describe	Describe	Describe
Describe	Describe	Describe	Describe
Describe	Describe	Describe	Describe
Cause/Result	Cause/Result	Describe	Describe
Exemplify*	Replace	Cause/Result	Describe
	Describe	Compare	Evaluate
	Replace	Evaluate	Compare
	Contrast	Contrast	Define*
	Contrast		
	Narrate		
	Exemplify*		

Score: 5	Score: 5	Score: 3
Describe	Describe	Describe
Describe	Describe	Describe
Cause/Result	Describe	Describe
Describe	Compare/Contrast	Describe
Exemplify*	Exemplify*	Describe
	Describe	Describe
	Evaluate*	Describe

*Could be Classify or Conclude.

Abstraction Levels

Nold and Davis (1980) propose a system for representing the structure of a text based on coordination, subordination, and superordination:

> If a T-Unit is related to the preceding T-Unit by such rhetorical operations as conjoining, restating, contradicting, or contrasting on essentially the same level of abstraction as that T-Unit, then we call it coordinate to that T-Unit.

TABLE 7: SENTENCE ROLES IN NARRATIVES

Score: 12	Score: 9	Score: 9	Score: 6
State	State	State	Describe
Describe	Describe	Add	Describe
Describe	Describe	Describe	State
Describe	Cause/Result	Describe	Infer
Describe	Narrate	Describe	Narrate
Cause/Result	Narrate	Replace	Narrate
Narrate	Narrate	Narrate	Describe (Evaluate)
Narrate	Conclude	Narrate	Narrate-D
Narrate		Narrate	
Narrate-D		Narrate	
Narrate		Narrate-D	
Narrate		Describe (Evaluate)	
Describe (Evaluate)		Narrate	
Narrate		Narrate	
Narrate-D		Narrate	
Narrate-D		Narrate-D	
Narrate		Narrate	
Narrate-D		Narrate-D	
Narrate-D		Narrate-D	
Narrate-D		Narrate-D	
Narrate-D		Narrate-D	
Narrate-D		Narrate-D	
Narrate		Narrate-D	
Narrate		Narrate-D	
Conclude		Conclude	
		Conclude	

Score: 6	Score: 5	Score: 4
Describe	State	Describe
Describe	Describe	Describe
State	Describe	Narrate
Narrate	Describe	Narrate
Narrate	Narrate	Narrate
Narrate	Narrate	Narrate
Narrate	Narrate	Narrate
	Narrate	Narrate
	Narrate	Narrate-D
	Narrate	Narrate-D
	Conclude	Narrate-D
		Narrate-D
		Describe
		Describe
		Describe
		Describe
		Describe
		Describe
		Describe

> If a T-Unit is related to the preceding T-Unit by such rhetorical operations as explaining, defining, or exemplifying on an essentially lower level of abstraction than that T-Unit, then we call it subordinate to that T-Unit.
>
> If a T-Unit is related to the preceding T-Unit by such rhetorical operations as generalizing, drawing conclusions, or changing subjects and is therefore at a higher level of abstraction than that T-Unit, then we call it superordinate to that T-Unit. (pp. 142-143)

An attempt was made to analyze the descriptions and the fictional narratives for these abstraction levels; it was somewhat successful, after certain adjustments were made in the coding. For example, Nold and Davis diagram their T-Units on a coordinate relational plane as well as on the subordinate, coordinate, and superordinate levels. For example, coordinates at a different plane are diagrammed to indicate same level, but different plane. Since these plane differentials are not typical of third-graders discourse, such distinctions were not made in reporting the data from the analysis.

Abstraction levels in young students' descriptions seem to be characterized by a distancing from the reader and writer, with proximity as well as specificity determining lower abstraction levels. Thus when decisions about the level of a T-Unit were difficult, this distancing/proximity property determined the final coding choice. In the narratives, the level of subordination also seemed to correspond with both specificity and distancing. Dialogue was so specific and close to the reader and writer that it was coded at the lowest level of abstraction.

Plotting the levels in the compositions exposed flatter plots for the descriptions, with a tendency for more level complexity in papers that received higher holistic ratings. The plots of the narratives displayed more movement among abstraction levels, again with higher-rated compositions appearing, in general, to have more level complexity. Results of a t-test confirm these differences between the descriptions and the fictional narratives. Narratives had significantly more movement among abstraction levels, at the .01 level of confidence. The plots for the abstraction levels in both genres is displayed in Figure 5.

Information Focus

Compositions were examined for old and new information as reflected in topic and comment. All sentences were topic and comment in both the descriptions and fictional narratives, perhaps because students have not yet mastered the various strategies for altering such patterns. Correspondingly, the old information came first in the clause, followed by the new, with few exceptions. These exceptions in the descriptions occurred in sentences containing the circumstance clauses described above. In narratives, the few exceptions occurred for dialogue. Since variety of information focus was such a "small" factor in these compositions, a detailed analysis was not performed.

Correlations

Pearson product-moment correlations were employed for the normalized data to identify features that correlate with holistic scores within a set of compositions. For the descriptions, moderately high positive

DESCRIPTIONS

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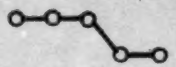

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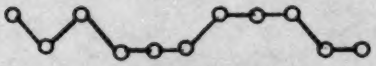

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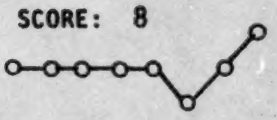
SCORE: 8



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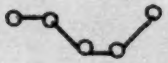

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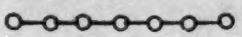

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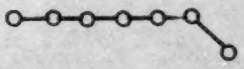

NARRATIVES

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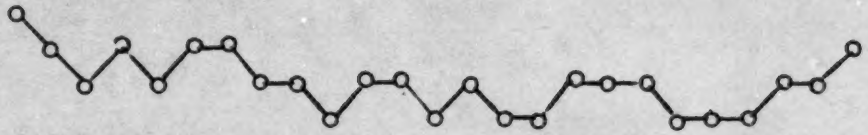

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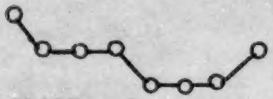

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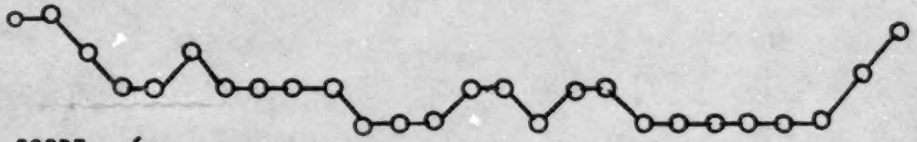

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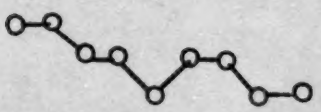

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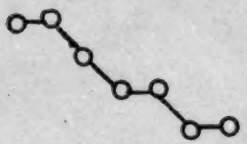

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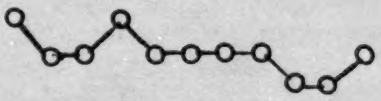

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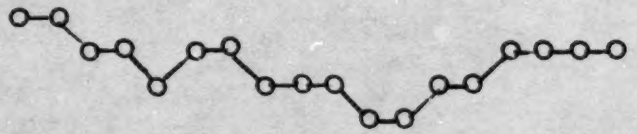

Figure 5. ABSTRACTION LEVELS

correlations were found for number of adjectives, number of adverbs, and number of subordinate clauses. Moderately positive correlations were found for total number of words, average number of words per T-Unit, lexical collocation, conjunction, sentence roles, abstraction levels, and sentence-pattern variation. For the fictional narratives, moderately high positive correlations were found for total number of words, and moderate positive correlations were identified for number of adjectives, abstraction levels, conjunction, and number of subordinate clauses. Complete results are displayed in Table 8.

TABLE 8: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN HOLISTIC RATINGS AND GENRE FEATURES

Feature	Descriptions	Narratives
No. Words	.63	.77
No. T-Units	.27	.52
Words per T-Unit	.65	.36
Sub. Clauses/100 Words	.75	.65
Sub. Clauses/T-Unit	.73	.57
No. Adverbs	74	.11
No. Adjectives	.80	.38
No. Verbs	03	.11
No. Nouns	.06	.23
No. Pronouns	.18	.24
Reference	.24	.10
Lexical Collocation	.58	.20
Lexical Repetition	.18	.22
Conjunction	.46	.59
Sen. Pattern Var.	.65	.26
Sen. Role Var.	.63	.11
Abstraction Lev. Move.	.45	.39

SUMMARY

Descriptions were distinguished from fictional narratives by more adjectives, greater lexical collocation, a greater variety of sentence roles, and adverbial clauses of circumstance. They may also be distinguished by greater sentence-pattern and sentence-role variation, since these features correlate positively with scores for the descriptions but not for the narratives.

Fictional narratives were distinguished from descriptions by more adverbs, more cohesive ties of conjunction, compound subjects and predicates, and greater movement among levels of abstraction, although the latter may be more a function of the maturity of the writers than of the discourse type. They also differ in some of the types of adverbial clauses found in the text.

Similarities as well as differences are important in characterizing genres. This study suggests that the genres may be similar in textual features pertaining to numbers of verbs, nouns, and pronouns. They may also be alike in amount of lexical reference and repetition and in ratio of subordinate clauses to numbers of words and to T-Units.

The procedures followed appear applicable to systematic study to determine the micro- and macro-characteristics of various types of writing by various levels of writers.

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APPENDIX

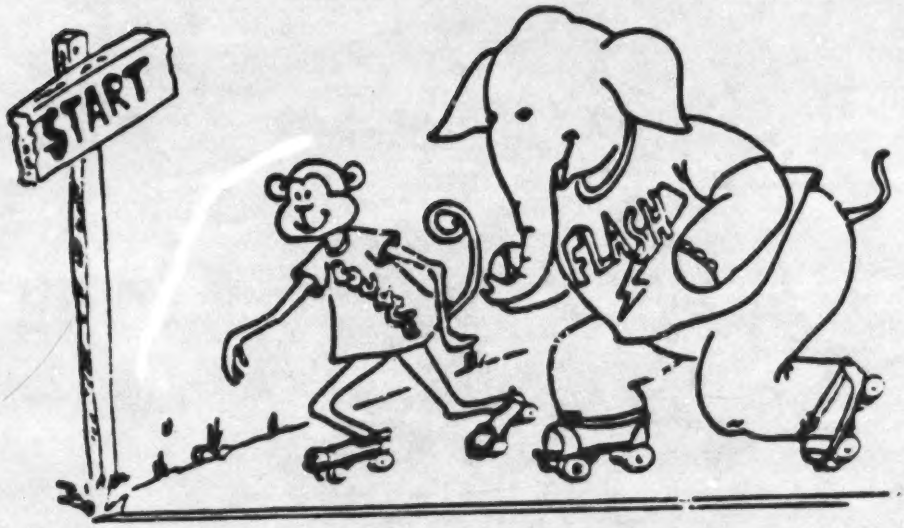
PROMPTS

Prompt for Descriptions

Write a paragraph that tells your class about an orange.

Tell how it looks.
Tell how it feels when you pick it up in your hand.
Tell how it smells when you open it to eat it.
Tell how it tastes.

Prompt for Fictional Narratives



Look at the picture of these animals. Both animals are wearing skates. The monkey's name is Bounce. The elephant's name is Flash. Write a story about the picture and the animals in it.

- Tell something about the way the animals look.
- Tell what they do together on their skates.
- Have something strange or funny happen to them.
- Write a good ending for your story.
- Give your story a title.

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